

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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Editorial

Birds in Encyclopaedia Britannica

Some years ago when a cousin moved from his palatial bungalow in Chembur to a flat in Nariman Point, he decided to give away his set of Encyclopaedia Britannica (9th Edition 1889) for lack of space in his new abode. I was the lucky recipient. The bird section in these volumes should be of great interest to our readers. Everyone will enjoy the flawless language, and the experts will be able to think over the changes which have taken place, particularly in systematics, over the last hundred years. I start this series with the section on Nidification. I doubt if recent knowledge requires this to be altered at all. Ignore the first line which connects with the previous section.

Siberian Cranes

The Oriental Bird Club Bulletin 23 of May 1996, reports that these cranes returned to Bharatpur on 1.2.96, after an absence of 2 years. It is suggested that the "return" may be caused by a change in the grazing regime of the Park. It will be recalled that some years ago on the recommendation of the BNHS, grazing of buffaloes and cattle was stopped resulting in a high growth of unsuitable vegetation for these birds and the suppression of its favoured food the tuber of an aquatic sedge *Cyperus rotundas*. Strange are the ways of ecology - the connection between buffaloes and Siberian cranes and waterfowl. In November 1965, after an IUCN/IBWL meeting in Delhi, we went to Bharatpur. I remember a comment by Peter Scott. He thought that the impressive congregation of ducks was due to the extraordinary productivity of the waters - and the high productivity of the ecosystem was due partly to buffalo droppings.

Blackwinged Kite

For the past few months I have been watching carefully a pair of blackwinged kites on the Agram Military Farm grounds near Koramangala. As all birdwatchers know, it is a rare pleasure to watch these birds. Lovely light grey colour, jet black shoulder and primaries, blood red eye; yellow legs, black claws. The last time (17.6.96 5 p.m.), there was a strong breeze; all the other birds except mynas and one solitary black-bellied finch lark were hiding "indoors". But the kite, taking advantage of the wind remained stationary without any seeming effort of the wings.

It is always interesting to see birds through the eyes of other watchers. Everyone has his own particular point of view. What is noteworthy for A, seems unimportant to B. Here are some examples about this bird:

Ben King : Pale plumage, black underside of primaries. Often hovers; graceful glides with raised wings. Tame; uses exposed perches.

Joseph George : An individual observed hovering for 353 seconds, i.e. over 5 1/2 minutes.

Bikram Grewal : Usually solitary or in pairs; resting on exposed perch.... regularly hovering like a kestrel.

Salim Ali : Keeps to a favoured locality and may be seen perched on the same pole or tree top day after day.... hovers cumbrously."

Salim's use of the word "cumbrously" is important, as the bird does not hover as effortlessly as a kestrel. Salim Ali also says its call *gree-er, gree-er*, is seldom heard. Why then is the bird called vociferous?

Parks for Peace

Border parks, transfrontier parks, international peace parks: the concept is the same : protected areas that meet across international borders.

A glance at a world map of parks and reserves reveals that a great number of protected areas have been established in frontier regions. This is not surprising as the perimeters of nations are often scarcely populated by man and boundaries often follow the crest line of mountain ranges where scenic and wildlife values are high. But biology does not respect human boundaries and it has often been politically advantageous for nations to set up protected areas adjoining those of neighbouring countries. This can result in ecological benefits of larger, contiguous protected areas and of shared responsibility. In addition, there are political benefits which promote bilateral understanding and strengthen ties between countries."

In the 9th General Assembly of IUCN held in Lucerne in June 1966, a suggestion was made that an international park should be established in the Rann of Kutch including disputed areas of both sides of the national boundaries of

India and Pakistan. Unfortunately this proposal has never been seriously pursued. However, the IUCN proposes to hold a meeting later this year to consider the possibility of Parks for Peace in some areas where there is conflict between two countries. Already a number of such Parks are in existence. In India there is the Mannas Wildlife Sanctuary on both sides of the border of India and Bhutan which together form one of the largest and most important conservation units in the entire Indian sub-continent. Similarly, the Sunderbans Reserve of India and Bangladesh protect a portion of the world's largest extent of mangrove forests in the Bay of Bengal.

With a view to promote the idea of a park in the Rann of Kutch I wrote to a number of people in India, both ecologists and administrators, to find out if they were willing to participate in a Task Force to put up a detailed proposal. As we know, much ornithological work has been done both by India and Pakistan in the Rann of Kutch area so that information on its bird life and on the ecosystem of the area is available.

Among the various suggestions received, the one by our Foreign Secretary, Mr Salman Haidar, in his personal capacity, is worth thinking about. He writes :-

"Your concept of a Peace Park in the Rann of Kutch seems to me to be visionary and, from what I am able to gather, functionally highly desirable. It is perhaps advantageous that today, unlike 1966, the Indo-Pak boundary in the Rann is relatively tranquil. Your proposal, thus, would not look like a dramatic gesture for peace, as it might have done in the mid-60s, for that would bring its own complications. It might be easier to aim at something less ambitious which works with the grain of current possibilities.

You would be interested to know that some preliminary thought has been given to the possibility of trans-national conservation zones within the SAARC area. Should the overall concept take hold then the Rann is one possible project that could emerge.

SAARC may help eventually, but the problems inherent in the enterprise must not be minimised. Our own side, we have security concerns about infiltration and other unfriendly activity in this region; perhaps the Pakistanis would voice similar concerns. Thus the security forces on the two sides will not be supportive.

You would also have to reckon with the fact that there are border definition problems in certain sectors. The Sir Creek is one such sector, and this could complicate the conservation plan.

In these circumstances, one cannot expect any great willingness among the concerned authorities for a jointly managed trans-national border park, or even for effective coordination of management. However, a lesser goal may be attainable. The two countries could act separately but in parallel to establish contiguous national parks, with some broad understanding that they would be managed in a

manner that served the same ends on both sides of the border. Exchange of information, perhaps even some regular contact between wardens and specialists, could be envisaged. Trans-national management may be impossible but a form of national management that takes into account the concerns across the border could conceivably be a manageable goal." Perhaps a BNHS/WWF/IOC/BIRDLIFE Consortium should take the initiative.

Indexes

That indexes are invaluable goes without saying and we are grateful to Aasheesh Pittie for his 10 year index of the NLBW from 1980-81 (Vol.34, No.3). He is, I believe, attempting to retrieve copies of the earlier years and it would be a great convenience to have a index of these issues where so much good matter resides.

Indexing is a highly specialised task and one where considerable judgement has to be exercised regarding the selection of key words, cross referencing, and deciding on the matter to be included. The indexer has to keep in mind the quality of the readership and what they are mainly looking for. In Pittie's index, for example, he has decided on a geographical index and I think that from the point of view of the Newsletter this is very satisfactory.

I had requested Kumar Ghorpade to review Pittie's recent Bibliographic Index to the Ornithology of the Indian Region and this is included in this issue. It seems to me that Ghorpade is too severe in his criticism but nevertheless his comments are useful. Pittie's reply should give the quietus to this controversy.

Nidification

Following or coincident with the actions just named, and countless more besides, comes the real work of the breeding-season, to which they are but the prelude or the accompaniment. Nidification is with most birds the beginning of this business; but with many it is a labour that is scamped if not shirked. Some of the Auk tribe place their single egg on a bare ledge of rock, where its peculiar conical shape is but a precarious safeguard when rocked by the wind or stirred by the thronging crowd of its parents' fellows. The Stone-Curlew and the Goatsucker deposit their eggs without the slightest preparation of the soil on which they rest; yet this is not done at haphazard, for no birds can be more constant in selecting, almost to an inch, the very same spot which year after year they choose for their procreant cradle. In marked contrast to such artless care stand the wonderful structures which others, such as the Tailor-bird, the Bottle-Titmouse, or the Fantail-Warbler build for the comfort or safety of their young. But every variety of disposition may be found in the Class. The Apteryx seems to entrust its abnormally big egg to an excavation among the roots of a tree-fern; while a band of female Ostriches scrape holes in the desert-sand and therein promiscuously dropping their eggs cover them with earth and leave the task of incubation to the male, who discharges the duty thus imposed upon him by night only, and trusts by day

to the sun's rays for keeping up the needful, fostering warmth. The Megapodes raise a huge hotbed of dead leaves wherein they deposit their eggs and the young are hatched without further care on the part of either parent. Some of the Grebes and Rails seem to avail themselves in a less degree of the heat generated by vegetable decay, and dragging from the bottom or sides of the waters they frequent fragments of aquatic plants form of them a rude half floating mass which is piled on some growing water-weed - but these birds do not spurn the duties of maternity. Many of the Gulls, Sandpipers, and Plovers lay their eggs in a shallow pit which they hollow out in the soil, and then as incubation proceeds add thereto a low breastwork of haulm. The Ringed Plover commonly places its eggs on shingle, which they so much resemble in colour, but when breeding on grassy uplands it paves the nest-hole with small stones. Pigeons mostly make an artless platform of sticks so loosely laid together that their pearly treasures may be perceived from beneath by the inquisitive observer. The Magpie as though self-conscious that its own thieving habits may be imitated by its neighbours, surrounds its nest with a hedge of thorns. Very many birds of almost every group bore holes in some sandy cliff, and at the end of their tunnel deposit their eggs with or without bedding. Such bedding, too, is very various in character; thus, while the Shelduck and the Sand-Martin supply the softest of materials, the one of down from her own body, the other of feathers collected by dint of diligent search, - the Kingfisher forms a couch of the undigested spiny fish-bones which she ejects in pellets from her own stomach. Other birds, as the Woodpeckers, hew holes in living trees, even when the timber is of considerable hardness, and therein establish their nursery. Some of the Swifts secrete from their salivary glands a fluid which rapidly hardens as it dries on exposure to the air into a substance resembling isinglass, and thus furnish the "edible birds' nests" that are the delight of Chinese epicures. In the architecture of nearly all the Passerine birds, too, some salivary secretion seems to play an important part. By its aid they are enabled to moisten and bend the otherwise refractory twigs and straws and glue them to their place. Spiders' webs also are employed with great advantage for the purpose last mentioned, but perhaps chiefly to attach fragments of moss and lichen so as to render the whole structure less obvious to the eye of the spoiler. The Tailor-bird deliberately spins a thread of cotton and therewith stitches together the edges of a pair of leaves to make a receptacle for its nest. Beautiful too is the felt fabricated of fur or hairs by the various species of Titmouse, while many birds ingeniously weave into a compact mass both animal and vegetable fibres, forming an admirable non-conducting medium which guards the eggs from the extremes of temperature outside. Such a structure may be open and cup-shaped, supported from below as that of the Chaffinch and Goldfinch, domed like that of the Wren and Bottle-Titmouse, slung hammock-wise as in the case of the Golden-crested Wren and the Orioles, or suspended by a single cord as with certain Grosbeaks and Hummingbirds. Under such circumstances it is even sometimes needful to balance the nest lest the weight of the growing young should destroy the equipoise and, precipitating them on the ground,

dash the hopes of the parents, and compensation in such cases is applied by loading the opposite side of the structure with lumps of earth. Certain Warblers (*Aedon* and *Thamnobia*) for some unascertained reason invariably lay a piece of snake's slough in their nests - to repel, it has been suggested, marauding lizards who may thereby fear the neighbourhood of a deadly enemy. The clay-built edifices of the Swallow and Martin are known to everybody, and the Nuthatch plasters up the gaping mouth of its nest-hole till only a postern large enough for entrance and exit, but easy of defence, is left. In South America we have a family of birds (*Furnariidae*) which construct on the branching roots of the mangrove globular ovens, so to speak, of mud, wherein the eggs are laid and the young hatched. The Flamingo erects in the marshes it frequents a mound of earth some two feet in height, with a cavity atop, on which the hen, having oviposited, sits astride with dangling legs, and in that remarkable attitude is said to perform the duty of incubation. The females of the Hornbills, and perhaps of the Hoopoes, submit to incarceration during this interesting period, the males immuring them by a barrier of mud, leaving only a small window to admit air and food, which latter is assiduously brought to the prisoners.

But though in a general way the dictates of hereditary instinct are rigidly observed by birds, in many species a remarkable degree of elasticity is exhibited or the rule of habit is rudely broken. Thus the noble Falcon, whose ordinary eyry is on the beetling cliff, will for the convenience of procuring prey condescend to lay its eggs on the ground in a marsh, or appropriate the nest of some other bird in a tree. The Golden Eagle, too, remarkably adapts itself to circumstances, now rearing its young on a precipitous ledge, now on the arm of an ancient monarch of the forest and again on a treeless plain, making a humble home amid grass and herbage. Herons also show the same versatility and will breed according to circumstances in an open fen, on sea-banks or (as is most usual) on lofty trees. Such changes are easy to understand. The instinct of finding food for the family is predominant, and where most food is there will the feeders be gathered together. This explains, in all likelihood, the associated bands of Ospreys or Fish-Hawks, which in North America breed (or used to breed) in large companies where sustenance is plentiful, though in the Old World the same species brooks not the society of aught but its mate. Birds there are of eminently social predilections. In Europe,

excepting Sea-fowls whose congregations are universal and known to all - we have perhaps but the Heron, the Fieldfare, and the Rook, which habitually flock during the breeding-season; but in other parts of the world many birds unite in company at that time, and in none possibly is this habit so strongly developed as in the Anis of the Neotropical Region, the Republican Swallow of North America, and the Sociable Grosbeak of South Africa, which last joins nest to nest until the tree is said to break down under the accumulated weight of the common edifice.

In the strongest contrast to these amiable qualities is the parasitic nature of the Cuckoos of the Old World and the Cow-birds of the New, but this peculiarity of theirs is so well known that to dwell upon it would be needless. Enough to say that the egg of the parasite is introduced into the nest of the dupe, and after the necessary incubation by the fond fool of a foster mother the interloper successfully counterfeits the heirs, who perish miserably, victims of his superior strength. The whole process has been often watched, but the reflective naturalist will pause to ask how such a state of things came about, and there is not much to satisfy his enquiry. Certain it is that some birds whether by mistake or stupidity do not unfrequently lay their eggs in the nests of others. It is within the knowledge of many that Pheasants' eggs and Partridges' eggs are often laid in the same nest, and it is within the knowledge of the writer that Gulls' eggs have been found in the nests of Eider-Ducks, and vice-versa; that a Redstart and a Pied Flycatcher will lay their eggs in the same convenient hole - the forest being rather deficient in such accommodation; that an Owl and a Duck will resort to the same nest-box, set up by a scheming woodsman for his own advantage; and that the Starling, which constantly dispossesses the Green Woodpecker, sometimes discovers that the rightful heir of the domicile has to be brought up by the intruding tenant. In all such cases it is not possible to say which species is so constituted as to obtain the mastery, but it is not difficult to conceive that in the course of ages that which was driven from its home might thrive through the fostering of its young by the invader, and thus the abandonment of domestic habits and duties might become a direct gain to the evicted householder. This much granted, all the rest will follow easily enough, but it must be confessed that this is only a presumption, though a presumption which seems plausible if not likely.

(Encyclopaedia Britannica, 9th Edition, 1889, pp 771-2)



A Morning at the Nest of the Great Pied Hornbill

V. SANTHARAM, 68, 1 Floor, Santhome High Road, Madras 600 038

I was greatly elated and honoured when my friend, R Kannan, then (in 1993) doing his research on the ecology of the great pied hornbill in the Indira Gandhi Wildlife sanctuary, Tamilnadu, invited me to photograph these magnificent birds at a nest. My earlier encounters with this hornbill have been

brief, they being extremely wary and shy, and I never had the opportunity to watch them for any length of time. Secondly, Kannan was very particular that the birds at the nest should be least disturbed and had declined the offer of several other friends and photographers to photograph the hornbills.

But then there was a problem, I had very little time at my disposal, as I was busy with my own research work on the woodpeckers at the Peechi-Vazhani Wildlife Sanctuary, Kerala, and the period coincided with the breeding season of woodpeckers whose nests were difficult to find. I therefore decided to devote just a morning session for the birds and hoped things would work out well.

I landed at Topslip on a hot April afternoon. Kannan was away in the field and I had to await his arrival at the local tea-shop cum canteen. A couple of hours later he arrived and we sat down to discuss the programme. I was to be taken to the nest site early next morning by one of his tribal assistants. There was no possibility of erecting any hide for fear of disturbing the bird and I was to use the makeshift ground hide used as an observation post by Kannan who was monitoring the breeding biology and food consumed by the young and the female still inside the nest cavity. I was also casually told that only a few days earlier Kannan had seen a tiger peeping into the hide while he was observing the hornbills. A comforting thought indeed!

I had never been to the nest site earlier and since it was located within the evergreen forest, I wondered if there would be sufficient light to photograph the bird in the dim light that is typical of this forest. I was told that the morning session was better for photography as the male hornbill came to the nest more frequently and that the visits were unpredictable in the afternoons. I had only 100 ASK films with me and had a 400 mm telephoto lens with a maximum aperture of 5.6. All I could do was to hope for the best.

Early next morning I was up and after a hurried breakfast and coffee, I set out to photograph the hornbill. The morning was misty and cool. We set out at a brisk pace and soon entered the shola. I had a brief glimpse of a grey junglefowl as it darted across our path. Somewhere deep in the undergrowth was a spotted babbler, calling its "he'll beat you" calls. Bluewinged parakeets dashed from a tree, uttering their harsh call-notes. A pair of yellowbrowed bulbuls sat on a fruiting shrub and looked at our hurried march. We had no time to stop by and take a leisurely look at these birds as we had to reach the nest at the earliest. My guide led the way and after a trek of 35 minutes, we were at the site.

The guide pointed out the nest cavity on a tree some 20 m above the ground and also the location of the hide some 20 m from the base of the nest tree and I groaned! I had never appreciated Kannan's sense of photography and at this moment my belief was further strengthened. The nest cavity was facing southwest and right now the early morning sunlight was falling on the other side of the tree. My light meter read 5.6 and 1/30. I took a look at the interior of the hide where I was supposed to sit and wait for the bird for the next four hours. The 'hide' was located next to a tree and one had to rest his back against the tree as he squatted on the ground. I was warned not to make any sudden movement when the bird was around as it could then become suspicious and wary and after I looked at the hide, I wondered if I could remain still for such a considerable

period of time without developing cramps. There was no way I could rest the camera as there was no stand. Anyway there was no time to ponder over these problems and I had to get going with whatever was available.

I got into the hide and asked my guide to sit behind the trunk of a huge *Bombax*, some 15 m from the hide. It took a few minutes to adjust myself and the equipment within the tiny hide. I could hardly squeeze myself between the trunk of the tree and the camera with its telephoto lens on and further, it was going to be difficult to keep the camera in position without having anything to rest it on. So I decided to keep the camera on my lap till the bird was nearby.

I did not have to wait very long. I soon heard the unmistakable loud wingbeats that announced the arrival of the bird. The great pied hornbill (GPH) flew to a tree to my left and a little later flew directly overhead and landed on a nearby tree. Ten minutes later, it was at the nest, feeding the inmates with red-coloured *Ficus* fruits (*Ficus mysorensis*?), about an inch in diameter. About six or seven fruits were passed on, one by one. The bird looked (suspiciously?) in my direction as I lifted the camera and began to shoot. The bird turned and twisted its neck and head as it scanned. I held my breath and prayed that the bird would not spot my presence. After a couple of minutes, it flew to the top branch of the same tree and continued to look at the hide. A couple of racket-tailed drongs kept mobbing the bird but it appeared to be least bothered by them. The hornbill thrashed the bill (wiping?), loudly 2-3 times on the branch. After some fifteen minutes it flew away.

A little later I heard the loud, sharp but brief call ('Bark') of the GPH 62 times with two pauses of 10-15 sec each. One other GPH responded some distance away. Possibly a second bird also responded but much farther away, once or twice. The pause between one 'bark' and the next was 2-3 seconds. I estimated that the first bird was about 200 m away. This is perhaps a contact call, used in communication.

Exactly an hour after it had fed the birds at the nest, the GPH returned again and fed fruits as before. As on the earlier occasion, the bird fed from the top of the nest on the tree knob in which the hole was located. In five minutes, it was off again. The 'barking' calls were soon resumed and were heard over 50 times. The bird came twice after this, with an hour's gap each. On the last visit, it had brought some small mammal (a rat or a flying squirrel) which it transferred in three instalments. Small mammals such as flying squirrels, snakes, and other lesser animals form part of the diet of nestlings and the female bird inside the nest cavity and these may provide additional proteins, according to Kannan.

In the prolonged gap between the visits of the male GPH, I could see a tip of the bill (of the incarcerated female?) protruding from inside the nest cavity, tapping the sides of the vertical slit on two occasions. The slit was some 1.5-2.0 inch wide. The tapping sound was clearly audible from my hide. This was suspended on the arrival of the male and was

resumed only after the bird left the tree after feeding the female.

Soon after the bird left after its fourth visit, we decided to call it a day. I had managed to shoot some twenty odd pictures during these four visits. The light had slightly improved after the second visit and I was hopeful of getting a fairly decent picture. I signaled to the tribal assistant to come

out and I casually enquired if he had seen or heard any wildlife in the past four hours. He responded by saying that there was a large sloth bear a few metres from him (fortunately away from me!). We then started our trek back to the camp, bidding goodbye to the great pied hornbill and his family. I carried back with me the memories and photographs of one of the most spectacular birds of the Western Ghats and also a few ticks that kept itching for the next few weeks!



Birdlife of a 'Beautiful Forest' — Sundarvan, Natural Discovery Centre, Ahmedabad

ABDUL JAMIL URFI, *Centre for Environment Education
Thaltej Tekra, Ahmedabad 380 054*

Ahmedabad is certainly not among the greenest cities of India. Since parks and patches of woodland are so few in number in this *gardabad* (i.e. dusty town) 'Sundarvan' is a relief and a pleasant change of scenery. This two-acre plot, an extension of the *Centre for Environment Education*, is a unique nature discovery centre. It specializes on snakes and reptiles and has a range of nature education activities such as a number of animal exhibits, live snake shows, a snake catching and releasing programme, nature camps etc. But more about that later and elsewhere.

It would have been one thing if I had spent some time in Sundarvan, while on a visit to Ahmedabad; spent a few hours birding here and at the end of the day made a checklist of birds. But I think, I will have to take a slightly different approach since I work and live here. I joined the CEE this February as the overall coordinator of Sundarvan and its umbrella activities. In a way I consider it an honour to have been made in-charge of this park. This is not only because 'Sundarvan' is a well known centre for nature activities in Ahmedabad but also because Lavkumar Khacher — who needs no introduction to the readers of the **newsletter** — was heading this programme and I have stepped into his shoes since he retired last year. Over the years several other well known personalities have been closely associated with Sundarvan, the late Reuben David (the legendary director and creator of the Ahmedabad Zoo) being one. This park was formally inaugurated by Salim Ali in 1979.

Record of Sundarvan birds

Sundarvan is a nicely wooded area having plenty of Neem, Ficus, Mango, Bamboo, Gulmohur and other trees. Its well wooded status is perhaps attributable to the high priority placed on tree plantation by its parent organisation and also due to the fact that many a VIP visitor planted a tree. So with plenty of trees, their leaf litter and two medium sized ponds on the campus this area is a good habitat for all manner of birds. As would be expected woodland birds dominate the birdscape of Sundarvan. During the last couple of months some of the interesting species I have seen are: a

female paradise flycatcher, green bee eaters at nest, white-browed fantail flycatcher, white-spotted fantail flycatcher, iora, goldenbacked woodpecker, golden oriole etc.

Because of the two ponds some wetland birds are also present such as night heron, paddy bird, little egret, lesser whistling teal, white-breasted waterhen, little cormorant, white-breasted kingfisher and pied kingfisher.

The only record of the birds of Sundarvan that I can find in my office is a one page and perhaps hurriedly compiled checklist by Gulab and Himanshu, dated 20th June, 1984 listing 77 species. Going through this list and based on my own observations and discussions with colleagues it appears that some of the entries are doubtful. These concern longlegged buzzard, white-eyed buzzard, merlin, kestrel, yellow-wattled lapwing, redwhiskered bulbul and grey tit. However, for the purpose of record I have mentioned all of them in the checklist presented in the appendix, with additions from my own birding and of Lavkumar Khacher, Pranav Trivedi and Narendra Jethua. According to Lavbha some of the birds that have possibly become locally extinct (i.e. not seen over the last 4-5 years) are little green heron, small blue kingfisher, grey shrike and whitebrowed bulbul. In this list were also the fantail flycatchers but they seem to have made a comeback this year.

At the time I am writing this article (April) several resident birds of Sundarvan are nesting. Coppersmiths, for instance, are heard 'tut-tuting' all day long and some are to be seen chipping in the trees or exploring the nest holes of yesteryear. There are several termite eaten trees on this campus and it is interesting to note that some of them have as many as 5 barbet holes. I suspect that these holes were made over several nesting years and not in just one year, unless a bird dug out one first and then abandoned it in any given year.

Grey partridge is another bird which is to be seen moving around in family parties i.e. 2 adults and 4-7 chicks following the parents dutifully. Given that their nesting habitat is restricted within the boundary of Sundarvan, to what

extent can their populations grow and when will an upper limit be reached? This question is especially interesting in relation to the 'insular' (island) nature of Sundarvan which I will discuss below.

An island of wilderness in a concrete jungle

Till a decade ago the area around Sundarvan was fairly deserted. There were open fields and a few educational institutes such as the Indian Space Research Organisation campus closeby. But over the years as the demand for housing has increased, many residential colonies have come up. At present Sundarvan is virtually surrounded by concrete structures. The ISRO campus seems to be the only green area in the vicinity. Towards the east there is an open field but that too has been taken over by the land sharks and in the next couple of years buildings will come up. All these activities are bound to affect the birds. But in what way?

Depending upon what their habits are, perhaps some species will go locally extinct, some will remain constant in numbers and some may even grow stronger, benefitting from the developments associated with urbanisation. We can find this out by monitoring the bird populations closely. In this regard I have initiated a monthly bird population census with the help of an enthusiastic volunteer, Narender Jethua. At the moment what we do is that on one day each month we walk along a constant transect at a constant time of the day (early morning) and count all the birds seen/heard. An idea of the size of some of the bird populations at Sundarvan can be had from the information given in the birds checklist in appendix. For the future we would like to incorporate other elements in this bird monitoring programme. Ideally, we want a record of breeding success of some important and indicator species, over several years which will give us some insights into how bird populations are responding to changes in and around Sundarvan.

Acknowledgement

I thank Lavkumar bhai, Pranav Trivedi, Narender and Gulab Jethua and E K Nareshwar for many interesting discussions.

Appendix

Checklist of the birds of Sundarvan

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status	Nos.	Comments
Little cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	R	1	U/N
Little green heron	<i>Ardeola striatus</i>	?	?	LK
Paddybird	<i>Ardeola greyii</i>	R	4	+
Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	R	1	+
Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	R	1	U/N
Night heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	R	12	U/N
Lesser whistling teal	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	MV	-	LK
Nukka duck	<i>Sarkidiomis melanotos</i>	MV	-	LK
Blackwinged kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	?	?	+

Pariah kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	FO	-	+
Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	?	?	+
Longlegged buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	?	?	+
White-eyed buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>	?	?	+
Whitebacked vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>	FO	-	+
Egyptian vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	FO	-	U/N
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	?	?	+
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	?	?	+
Grey partridge	<i>Francoelinus pondicerianus</i>	BR	7	+
Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	BR	5	+
Grey quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	?	?	+
Whitebreasted waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoeniceus</i>	BR	2	+
Pheasant-tailed jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>	?	?	+
Indian stone curlew	<i>Burhinus oedipnemus</i>	?	?	+
Redwattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	R	1	+
Yellow-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>	?	?	+
Common sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>	R	1	+
Blue rock pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	R	6	U/N
Ring dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	R	10	+
Spotted dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	R	2	+
Little brown dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	R	5	+
Yellowlegged green pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicoptera</i>	?	?	+
Red turtle dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>	?	?	+
Roseringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	FO	5	+
Blossomheaded parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>	?	?	+
Pied crested cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>	MV	-	+
Brainfever bird	<i>Cuculus varius</i>	R	-	+
Koel	<i>Eudynamis scolopacea</i>	BR	3	+
Sirkeer cuckoo	<i>Taccocua leschenaultii</i>	?	?	+
Crow-pheasant	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	BR	1	+
Spotted owl	<i>Athene brama</i>	RV?	-	+
Pied kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	Va	2	+
Small blue kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	?	?	LK
Whitebreasted kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrmensis</i>	BR	2	+
Green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	BR	4	+
Indian roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	?	?	+
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	R	-	+
Crimsonbreasted barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	BR	5	+
Goldenbacked woodpecker	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	R	1	U/N
Yellowfronted pied woodpecker	<i>Picoides maharattensis</i>	?	?	+
Indian pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>	?	?	PT
Grey shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	?	?	+
Baybacked shrike	<i>L. vittatus</i>	?	?	+
Rufousbacked shrike	<i>L. schach</i>	?	?	+
Golden oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	VA	1	+
Black drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>	R	2	+
Grey drongo	<i>D. leucophaeus</i>	?	?	LK
Whitebellied drongo	<i>D. caeruleus</i>	VA	?	+
Brahminy myna	<i>Stumus pagodarum</i>	?	?	+
Rosy pastor	<i>S. roseus</i>	?	?	+
Starling	<i>S. vulgaris</i>	?	?	+
Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	R	8	+

Bank myna	<i>Aeginianus</i>	?	?	+
Tree pie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	?	?	+
Common crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	R	3	+
Jungle crow	<i>C. macrorhynchos</i>	R	1	+
Common wood shrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>	?	?	LK
Large cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina novaehollandiae</i>	?	?	LK/PT
Small minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>	?	?	+
Common iora	<i>Aeginthina tiphia</i>	R	3	+
Redwhiskered bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>	?	?	+
Whitecheeked bulbul	<i>P. leucogenys</i>	?	?	+
Redvented bulbul	<i>P. cafer</i>	R	2	+
Whitebrowed bulbul	<i>P. luteolus</i>	?	?	LK
Common babbler	<i>Turdoides caudatus</i>	R	-	+
Large grey babbler	<i>T. malcolmi</i>	?	?	+
Jungle babbler	<i>T. striatus</i>	R	35	+
Greyheaded flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>	?	?	+
Whitebrowed fantail flycatcher	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>	R	2	+
Whitethroated fantail flycatcher (= Whitespotted sp. albogularis)	<i>R. albicollis</i>	V	1	U/N
Paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>	VA	1	+
Franklin's wren warbler	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>	?	?	LK
Ashy wren warbler	<i>P. socialis</i>	BR	-	+
Tailor bird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	BR	6	+
Magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	BR	2	LK

Indian robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>	R/BR	1	+
Grey tit	<i>Parus major</i>	?	?	+
Yellow wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	M	1	+
Grey wagtail	<i>M. cinerea</i>	M	-	+
Large pied wagtail	<i>M. maderaspatensis</i>	?	?	+
Tickell's flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>	?	?	+
Purple sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	BR	6	+
White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosa</i>	R	9	+
House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	R	-	U/N
Baya	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	?	?	+
Blackthroated weaverbird	<i>P. benghalensis</i>	?	?	LK
Red munia	<i>Estrilda amandava</i>	?	?	LK
Whitethroated munia	<i>Lonchura malabarica</i>	R	10	+

The names in this checklist are based on Ali and Ripley's pictorial guide (1983). Notes: Abbreviations used in second column: R - resident; M - migrant; FO - Flying overhead; BR - Breeding; MV - Monsoon visitor; VA - Vagrant. The third column lists the numbers of only those species which were counted on the census during February-March, 1996. The basis of this checklist is the checklist of Sundarvan birds prepared by Gulab and Himanshu (1984), indicated by '+'. Annotations to this list proposed by: U/N, Urfi & Narender; LK - Lavkumar Khacher; PT - Pranav Trivedi.



Shovellers Galore at the Hebbal Tank

THOMAS F. MARTIN, 386 1st Main Road, SFS 407, GKV Post, Yelahanka New Town, Bangalore 560 065

My encounters with shovellers *Anas clypeata*, covering a period of almost six decades, suggests that they are very uncertain in their migrations to areas that lie below 25 latitude in our subcontinent; and even in those so-called favourable years only a limited number find their way down. Like most of our web-footed migratory visitors, shovellers are Siberian ducks, though a few of them are known to nest among some of the higher Himalayan sweet and salt water lakes. They are never met with in big flocks; small groups of six to ten birds is what one generally sees. Single birds may sometimes be seen flying in company of other ducks, the size and spatulate shape of their bills making shovellers always conspicuous.

My visit to the Hebbal Tank on the 29th February was indeed a very pleasant surprise, for there before my very eyes was a gathering of about two thousand in number of our various web-footed visitors and other local species, and surprisingly about five hundred of them were shovellers; spread out in groups of fifty or more. The shoveller drakes were predominant over the females, with their snow white chests contrasting singularly with their blackish bills, very dark green heads and necks, light chocolate sides, black upper and under tailcoverts, white tails; powder blue scapulars with the diagonal white bar and the splash of white

at the flanks. The drakes appeared to be more attentive to their cosmetic needs than the fairer sex, as they indulged in lengthy bouts of preening; during which time the pageantry of their plumage as mirrored by the sun's rays became all the more enhanced. The females exhibited their mottled brown hue with the blue and green markings on the scapulars which are more brightly coloured than in the average female duck, but drab as compared to the drake. The very sight of these shovellers in greater numbers than I had ever seen before was verily a treat to behold. In addition to the shovellers, there were scattered flocks of garganey *Anas querquedula*, common teal *Anas creca*, common pochard *Aythya ferina*, tufted duck *Aythya fuligula* and cotton teal *Nettapus coromandelianus*, all of which seemed to have an aversion to mixing with each other, as they constantly shifted location whenever encroached upon by some other species. A small group of eight blackwinged stilts *Himantopus himantopus* were busy probing the shallows in the northern corner of the tank which abuts the tank bund road on NH 7. Purple moorhen *Porphyrio porphyrio*, five in number, were busy raking out insects from the water-hyacinth *Eichornia crassipes*. The little grebes *Podiceps ruficollis*, about one hundred in number, kept exclusively to themselves in the southern corner of the tank,

seemingly reluctant to mingle with the migratory intruders; as whenever approached by some web-footed migrant they would make a bee-line for shelter near the hyacinth mass. A few coots *Fulica atra* swimming about with that peculiar

bobbing motion of the head and neck were quite at home with the migrants, and occasionally sought the company of the little grebes who were unconcerned about their intrusions.



Coppersmith Feeding on Winged Termites & Purple-rumped Sunbird Nesting in Eupatorium

J.C. UTTANGI, 36, Mission Compound, Dharwad 581 0011

Because, a few age old Banyan trees still remain in the forested city extension of Dharwad, the two specialized frugivorous birds namely, koel (*Eudynamis scolopacea*) and crimsonbreasted barbet or the coppersmith (*Megalaima haemacephala*), are thriving even today. In addition to these two species, which are regular and bulbuls and mynas also join them as regulars but, one or two occasionals like common grey hornbill (*Tokus birostris*) and a few isolated individuals of the migratory rosy pastor (*Sturnus roseus*) supplement their number.

Finding enough food in the Banyan tree, coppersmiths congregate in large numbers. On one occasion during January 1993 as many as 60 and more barbets were counted from a single tree standing by the side of Saptapur road. When banyan fruits diminish, barbets explore other fruit bearing trees like Guava and Neem available in the neighborhood of Dharwad. They are otherwise forced to depend entirely on insect food and other foliage Arthropods. Describing the feeding behaviour of coppersmiths, Salim Ali says, the bird sometimes eats winged termites which it captures by making ungainly flycatcher like sallies. During many years of birdwatching, I had not the luck to witness barbets engaged in capturing winged termites swarming high in mid air until 29th March 1995.

A swarm of small-sized winged termites had emerged from the ground near a house located behind the Municipal Corporation Open-Air Theatre at about 5.30 pm in the evening of 29th March 1995. The termites had managed to go up for 10-15 feet from the ground. Their tiny white wings shining against the setting sun attracted 5 pied bushchats. As I stood observing the sallies by the bushchats 4 black drongos arrived. They had no problem in dealing with the termites. They sprang from their perch and swallowed many of them. Seeing this drama 3 inquisitive house crows passing by also arrived. They could not achieve much success in the air but managed to pick up a few from the ground. After the crows, 4 red-vented bulbuls appeared and perched on a T.V. antenna. They had a good feast having mastered the art of catching winged insects in flight. Sometime later, 2 house-sparrows and magpie robin and an ashy wren warbler arrived but, what surprised me most was the sudden appearance of 2 crimson-breasted barbets.

These specialized frugivorous birds have now adapted themselves to feed on insects. Although they do not have a body form that provides them the ability to conduct sallies

successfully in mid air, they do not mind getting into action to utilise the opportunity to supplement their diet with fat and protein. This makes up for the less calorific value of the fruit.

Purple-rumped Sunbird Nesting in Eupatorium

A birdwatchers group consisting of 5 nationals of Haveri and Dharwad and 2 internationals of Grimsby, UK had planned to trek along the 12 kilometer asphalted road from Ambikanagar dam site down to Kali river hydroelectric power station close to Kawla caves on 3rd February 1996 to study birds. The cave site is approachable from both the eastern-hill side of Ambikanagar, and also from the western-hill side from Dandeli. Of the two species of hornbills settled here, the Malabar pied hornbill seemed to take possession of the eastern hill while the great Indian hornbill occupied the western side of the valley.

As we went on driving and trekking along Ambikanagar hillside, we saw extensive growth of *Eupatorium* weed on both sides of the road. Belonging to the family *Compositae* this plant grows to a moderate height of about 3-4 feet from the ground. Its seed is a parachutist and can be carried to great distances by wind. It stands as a biological indicator showing the open conditions of the once closed forests in Western Ghats. This threat to the Western Ghat rain forest has arisen due to mining leases close to protected areas and sanctuaries. In the Castle-rock localities it was noticed that the dense and heavy manganese dust covering the inflorescence and flowers of trees prevented sunbirds, flowerpeckers, minivets and warblers from feeding on them for nectar and insects. Mining near protected areas should be stopped.

Generally, birds prefer to nest and breed in localities where nest building materials as well as food for feeding their young ones are easily available. Our team trekking along the valley road on 3rd February 1996 had just come out of Kawla caves and had not even got ready for the usual exploratory exercise to spot out birds and had never regarded the *Eupatorium* weed near by as a likely place for sunbirds to nest. Suddenly a male purplerumped sunbird which had come with insects to feed its two nestlings in the nest suspending from the branch of *Eupatorium* drew the attention of one of the members of our team. I was a little away but, on retracing to the spot found an unhatched greenish egg with brown and grey patches lying on one side of the two nestlings who had withdrawn their gaping mouths.

The nest typical of sunbirds was on the bush branch about 3½ feet high from the ground.

In his book on Indian Birds (1979), Salim Ali while commenting on the nesting season of purplerumped sunbird, *Nectarinia zeylonica* says the season is not well defined although further Ali and Ripley (1987) confirm that the breeding activities of this species is spread throughout the year but, increasing from March to May in the Bengal region and from February to April in Southern India, with a second brood in July to September. The present finding of a nest of a purplerumped sunbird in the Western Ghats in Southern India, is evidence which goes to support the conclusion drawn in the following discussion on its breeding season.

The shortest incubation period for passerine birds which lay small eggs varies between 10-11 days (B.P. Martin 1987) but, many of them including sunbirds need about 14-15 days time as incubation period (Ali & Ripley, 1987). The actual time required for the purplerumped sunbird to complete its nest is not specified by Ali. However, for a good nest to be completed with projection portico etc. 2 days at least are

required. Further, for the female to lay eggs, for 3 eggs in this case, 3 days are required. Usually eggs laid in the nest do not hatch together but in sequence depending on intervals in laying. Therefore to complete the hatching process an additional 1-2 days are needed. Thus between nest to nestlings about 21-22 (2 + 15 + 3 + 2) days are required. In the present context, out of the three eggs only 2 hatched on 3rd February 1996. There appeared little chance for the third egg to hatch as the two nestlings in the nest had already advanced in age by a day or two. If we now count back 21 days from 3rd February 1996 we arrive at a date which falls on 14th January, a Sankranti day on which the birds started to construct their nest. It can be concluded therefore that the breeding season for the purplerumped sunbirds inhabiting the forest biotopes of Western Ghats in Southern India would be more or less midwinter time and the months during which they tend to nest and breed would be around middle of January and end of February.

I express here on behalf of the team our gratitude to the Department of Forest, Dandeli for their kind assistance and guidance during trekking through the valley.



District Rajouri lies in the sub-Himalayan region of Jammu and Kashmir between 70° to 74°4' east longitude and 32°58' to 33°35' north latitude on the old Mughal route to the Kashmir Valley. It encompasses an area of 2661 sq km and is bounded on the north by Poonch on the south by Jammu on east by Udhampur and in the west by Pak occupied Kashmir.

The terrain of Rajouri is mountainous and the Pir Panjal range runs through the district separating it from the Kashmir valley on the north east. This stretch of Pir Panjal passing through the district is full of high altitude alpine lakes and meadows. Most of the lakes drain into Kashmir valley across the Pir Panjal.

Rajouri town stands at an elevation 3094 feet from sea level and the district acquires maximum altitude with some peaks as high as 4535 m.

The climate of the district varies with altitudinal variation ranging from subtropical to temperate to alpine. However, the major area of the district has subtropical climate. It experiences an average annual rainfall of 1644 mm with as low as 28 mm in Nov. and as high as 413 in July.

The district has 48.66 per cent of its area under forest cover. The predominant species of trees, in coniferous forests, are *Pinus wallichiana* (blue pine), *Abies pindrow* (Fir) and *Pinus roxburghii* (Chir pine) with *Quercus incana* (Oak) patches, of broad leaved forests, along depressions in blue pine forests.

Birds of Rajouri

TAHIR SHAWL, Ward No. 10, Rajouri, J&K 185 131

The varied climate and diverse physiogeographical features make Rajouri the abode of a myriad bird species. But there have been no attempt to record these species. The endangered pheasant species like monal, kalij and peafowl are reported to be on a decline on account of their killing and loss of habitat.

The following are some species recorded by the author at different places during the last three years. There are many more species yet to be recorded.

S.No.	Common Name	Scientific Name
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Family : Ardeidae

1	Pond heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
2	Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>

Family : Accipitridae

3	Pariah kite	<i>Milvus migrans govinda</i>
4	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
5	Indian white-backed vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>
6	Egyptian or scavenger vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>

Family : Falconidae

7	Lesser kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>
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Family : Phasianidae

8	Grey partridge	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>
9	Kaliej pheasant	<i>Lophura leucomelana</i>
10	Common peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
11	Monal pheasant	<i>Lophophorus impejanus</i>

Family : Rallidae

- 12 Coot *Fulica atra*

Family : Charadriidae

- 13 Red wattled lapwing *Vanellus indicus*

Family : Columbidae

- 14 Little brown dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*
 15 Indian ring dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
 16 Spotted dove *Streptopelia chinensis*

Family : Psittacidae

- 17 Rose ringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

Family : Cuculidae

- 18 Pied crested cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*
 19 Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*

Family : Alcedinidae

- 20 Lesser pied kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*
 21 Whitebreasted kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*
 22 Common kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Family : Meropidae

- 23 Little green bee-eater *Merops orientalis*
 24 Chestnut headed bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti*

Family : Upupidae

- 25 Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Family : Capitonidae

- 26 Crimson-breasted barbet or
 coppersmith *Megalaima haemacephala*

Family : Picidae

- 27 Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*
 28 Mahratta woodpecker *Dendrocopos mahrattensis*

Family : Hirundinidae

- 29 Common swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Family : Laniidae

- 30 Baybacked shrike *Lanius vittatus*
 31 Rufous backed shrike *Lanius schach*

Family : Oriolidae

- 32 Golden oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

Family : Dicruridae

- 33 Black drongo or king crow *Dicrurus adsimilis*

Family : Sturnidae

- 34 Common myna *Acridotheres tristis*
 35 Brahminy myna or
 Black headed myna *Sturnus pagodarum*
 36 Pied myna *Sturnus contra*

Family : Corvidae

- 37 Yellowbilled blue magpie *Cissa flavirostris*
 38 Indian tree-pie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*
 39 Nut cracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*
 40 House crow *Corvus splendens*
 41 Jungle crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

**Family : Pycnonotidae**

- 42 Reed vented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*
 43 White-checked bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenysleucogenys*

Family : Muscicapidae**Sub-family : Timaliinae**

- 44 Jungle babbler *Turdoides striatus*

Sub-family : Muscicapinae

- 45 Paradise flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*
 46 White browed fantail flycatcher *Rhipidura eureka*

Sub-family : Sylviinae

- 47 Grey headed flycatcher-
 warbler *Seicercus xanthoschistos*
 48 Tailor bird *Orthotomus sutorius*
 49 Lesser white throat *Silvia curruca*

Sub-family : Tuurdinae

- 50 Magpie robin or dhyal *Copsychus saularis*
 51 Plumbeous redstart *Rhyacomis fuliginosus*
 52 White capped redstart or
 River chat *Chaimarromis leucocephalus*
 53 Indian robin *Saxicoloides fulicata*
 54 Fork tail *Enicurus (sp. not identified)*
 55 Pied bush chat *Saxicola caprata*
 56 Stone chat *Saxicola torquata*

Family : Cincidae

- 57 Brown dipper *Cinclus pallasii*

Family : Paridae

- 58 Grey tit *Parus major*
 59 Green backed tit *Parus monticolus*

Family : Motacillidae

- 60 White or pied wagtail *Motacilla alba*
 61 Yellow watgail *Motacilla flava*
 62 Large pied wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*

Family : Nectariniidae

- 63 Purple sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica*

Family : Zosteropidae

- 64 White eye *Zosterops palpebrosa*

Family : Ploceidae**Sub-family : Passerinae**

- 65 House sparrow *Passer domesticus*
 66 White throated munia or
 common silver bill *Lonchura malabarica*

Family : Strigidae

- 67 Spotted owl *Athene brama*

References

- Ali, S. and Ripley, S.D. (1989). A pictorial guide to the Birds of the Indian Sub-continent, Bombay Natural History Society, Oxford University Press, Bombay.
 Woodcock, Martin, W. (1986). Collins Handguide to the Birds of the Indian Sub-continent, Collins edition.





Birding around Chopasni Lake

PARTAP SINGH and MD IDRIS*, Desert Regional Station, Zoological Survey of India, Jodhpur 342 009, Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur

To consolidate the information on distribution, abundance and diversity of birds BNHS organises the 'Salim Ali Bird Count' every year on a Sunday or holiday close to 12th November (Dr Salim Ali's date of birth).

We formed a team to count the birds of Chopasni lake and its vicinity. The lake is situated 8 km North West of Jodhpur (26°18' N and 73°01' E). It is bordered by a hillock on one side and a dam on the other. In a good rainfall year the water persists for 6-7 months and starts receding during December-January. As soon as the water shrinks to the central area of the lake, people start farming in the lake bed. The birds, which start flocking the area after the monsoon, start migrating from the region, partly because of the anthropogenic factors and partially due to receding water.

The soil and climate of the locality are such that they cannot sustain anything better than scrub and thorny bushes. *Prosopis juliflora* predominates. Many other deserticolous elements, *Prosopis cineraria*, *Acacia nilotica*, *Ziziphus* spp., *Salvadora persica* and an occasional *Azadirachta indica*, constitute the tree component in the vicinity of the lake. Several grasses and herbs like *Cynodon dactylon*, *Cenchrus* sp. and *Cyperus* spp. form the ground cover.

On the morning of 12th November, we started the bird count around seven O'clock. An area of about 3 1/2 km was covered in approximately three hours and the number of each bird species sighted was recorded. Ali and Ripley's "Compact Handbook" and Woodcock's "Hand guide to the Birds of Indian sub-continent" were used as reference books for identification. The following birds were observed in the lake and its vicinity.

Family : Podicipedidae

- | | | | |
|---|--------------|----------------------------|---|
| 1 | Little grebe | <i>Podiceps ruficollis</i> | C |
|---|--------------|----------------------------|---|

Family : Phalacrocoracidae

- | | | | |
|---|------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 2 | Large cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> | R |
| 3 | Little cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax niger</i> | C |

Family : Ardeidae

- | | | | |
|---|--------------|---------------------------|---|
| 4 | Grey heron | <i>Ardea cinerea</i> | R |
| 5 | Large egret | <i>Ardea alba</i> | R |
| 6 | Pond heron | <i>Ardeola grayii</i> | R |
| 7 | Median egret | <i>Egretta intermedia</i> | R |
| 8 | Little egret | <i>Egretta garzetta</i> | R |

Family : Ciconiidae

- | | | | |
|---|---------------|------------------------------|---|
| 9 | Painted stock | <i>Mycteria leucocephala</i> | R |
|---|---------------|------------------------------|---|

Family : Threskiornithidae

- | | | | |
|----|------------|-------------------------------|---|
| 10 | White ibis | <i>Threskiornis aethiopia</i> | R |
| 11 | Spoonbill | <i>Platalea leucorodia</i> | R |

Family : Anatidae

- | | | | |
|----|---------------|---------------------------|---|
| 12 | Spotbill duck | <i>Anas poecilorhynca</i> | C |
|----|---------------|---------------------------|---|

Family : Accipitridae

- | | | | |
|----|-------------|-----------------------|---|
| 13 | Pariah kite | <i>Milvus migrans</i> | R |
|----|-------------|-----------------------|---|

Family : Phasianidae

- | | | | |
|----|----------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 14 | Grey partridge | <i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i> | A |
| 15 | Indian peafowl | <i>Pavo cristatus</i> | A |

Family : Rallidae

- | | | | |
|----|------|--------------------|---|
| 16 | Coot | <i>Fulica atra</i> | R |
|----|------|--------------------|---|

Family : Charadriidae

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 17 | Redwattled lapwing | <i>Vanellus indicus</i> | R |
| 18 | Curlew | <i>Numenius arquata</i> | C |
| 19 | Redshank | <i>Tringa totanus</i> | C |
| 20 | Wood sandpiper | <i>Tringa glareola</i> | R |
| 21 | Common sandpiper | <i>Tringa hypoleucos</i> | A |

Family : Recurvirostridae

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------|------------------------------|----|
| 22 | Blackwinged stilt | <i>Himantopus himantopus</i> | VA |
|----|-------------------|------------------------------|----|

Family : Burhinidae

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 23 | Indian stone curlew | <i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i> | R |
|----|---------------------|----------------------------|---|

Family : Laridae

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------|-------------------------|---|
| 24 | Blackheaded gull | <i>Larus ridibundus</i> | R |
| 25 | Indian river tern | <i>Sterna auranlia</i> | R |

Family : Columbidae

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------|------------------------------|----|
| 26 | Blue rock pigeon | <i>Columba livia</i> | VA |
| 27 | Ring dove | <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> | C |
| 28 | Little brown dove | <i>S. senegalensis</i> | C |

Family : Psittacidae

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------|---------------------------|---|
| 29 | Roseringed parakeet | <i>Psittacula krameri</i> | C |
|----|---------------------|---------------------------|---|

Family : Apodidae

- | | | | |
|----|-------------|---------------------|---|
| 30 | House swift | <i>Apus affinis</i> | R |
|----|-------------|---------------------|---|

Family : Alcedinidae

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 31 | Lesser pied kingfisher | <i>Ceryle rudius</i> | R |
| 32 | Common kingfisher | <i>Alcedo atthis</i> | R |
| 33 | Whitebreasted kingfisher | <i>Halcyon smymensis</i> | C |

Family : Meropidae

- | | | | |
|----|-----------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 34 | Small green bee-eater | <i>Merops orientalis</i> | C |
|----|-----------------------|--------------------------|---|

Family : Coraciidae

- | | | | |
|----|---------------|------------------------------|---|
| 35 | Indian roller | <i>Coracias benghalensis</i> | R |
|----|---------------|------------------------------|---|

Family : Upupidae

- | | | | |
|----|--------|--------------------|---|
| 36 | Hoopoe | <i>Upupa epops</i> | R |
|----|--------|--------------------|---|

Family : Laniidae

- | | | | |
|----|-------------|-------------------------|---|
| 37 | Grey shrike | <i>Lanius excubitor</i> | R |
|----|-------------|-------------------------|---|

Family : Sturnidae

38	Common Indian starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	C
39	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	C
40	Bank myna	<i>Acridotheres ginginianus</i>	C

Family : Corvidae

41	House crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	R
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Family : Campephagidae

42	Small minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>	R
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Family : Pycnonotidae

43	Whitecheeked bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus leucogenys</i>	C
44	Redvented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	C

Family : Muscicapidae

45	Large grey babbler	<i>Turdoides malcolmi</i>	C
46	Brown rock chat	<i>Cercomela fusca</i>	C
47	Indian robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulcata</i>	C

Family : Motacillidae

48	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cespica</i>	R
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Family : Nectariniidae

49	Purple sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	R
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Family : Ploceidae

50	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	C
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R = Rare C = Common A = Abundant VA = Very Abundant

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to Prof Ishwar Prakash, INSA Senior Scientist, for making us wildlife enthusiasts and for all his guidance and motivations.



Birds of Namdapha Tiger Reserve, Arunachal Pradesh, India.

VIDYA R. ATHREYA, NCRA, Post bag 3, Ganeshkhind, Pune 411007

Experiencing the phenomenal bird diversity of north-east India has always been a dream for birdwatchers. Its unique location at the junction of the Indo-Chinese region and the Indian subcontinent, and the wide altitudinal variation are the major factors influencing the diversity of birds as well as other fauna and flora.

Of the seven north-eastern states, Arunachal Pradesh still retains much of its primary forest cover (61% of its area - Bhattacharji 1992). To the north of Arunachal Pradesh lies China, to the east, Myanmar, and Bhutan to the west. Floristic and faunistic influences from China and Myanmar can be seen especially in the eastern part of this large state. For instance, Singh (1994) recorded Elliot's Laughing Thrush (*Garrulax ellioti*) in eastern Arunachal Pradesh. This species is otherwise known to occur in Yunnan in China.

I visited Namdapha Tiger Reserve which is situated in the Changlang district of eastern Arunachal Pradesh between October 1994 and March 1995. This is a vast and uninhabited expanse covering about 2000 sq. km. the altitude varies from 200 m in the valleys to about 4600 m at the summit of Dapha Bum. temperatures vary from 5°C to 35°C at lower altitudes and drops below freezing point at higher altitudes. Average rainfall varies between 2500 and 3500 mm (Chatterjee and Chandiramani 1986). Champion and Seth (1968) have mentioned three forest types that occur in this area. However a large part of this reserve is unexplored and it is likely that other vegetation types are present, especially in the higher reaches. Most of my time was spent in and around the tourist complex at Deban (390 m above sea level), the campsites hornbill (425 m asl) and

Bulbulia (640 m asl). I also traversed the Vijaynagar Deban route once (1200 m to 50 m asl). Namdapha Tiger Reserve has a few areas which are peculiar for the bird life which can be found there. For example, there are a few jheels in the middle of evergreen forest which are the typical habitats of the whitewinged wood duck (*Cairina scutulata*). One such jheel is the Rani jheel (800 m asl) which is situated about 4 km from Bulbulia. Another area of particular interest is Hornbill which is around 9 km from Deban. Hundreds of



Captive Peacock

wreathed (*Rhyticeros undulatus*) and rufousnecked (*Aceros nipalensis*) hornbills regularly congregate at dawn and dusk and probably roost there. Apart from these two common species, three other species of hornbills occur in the reserve (see list). A couple of kilometres from Deban is a small spring called Chirya poong where you are certain to see large numbers of pintail and wedgetail green pigeons.

I saw only a 100 species of birds during my visit there (identified using Ali and Ripley 1983); most of my time was taken up by a survey for the clouded leopard (my primary objective). The best period for visiting Namdapha Tiger reserve is from September to March. Further details may be had from the Field Director, Namdapha Tiger Reserve, Post Office Miao, Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh.

Family : *Phalacrocoracidae*

- 1 Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Family : *Ciconiidae*

- 2 Black stork *Ciconia niger*

Family : *Anatidae*

- 3 Common merganser *Mergus merganser*

Family : *Accipitridae*

- 4 Rufousbellied hawk-eagle *Hieraaetus kienerii*
5 Crested serpent eagle *Spilornis cheela*
6 Black eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis*

Family : *Falconidae*

- 7 Whitelegged falconet *Microhierax melanoleucos*

Family : *Phasianidae*

- 8 Khaleej pheasant *Lophura leucomelana*
9 Peacock-pheasant *Polyplectron bicalcaratum*

Family : *Charadriidae*

- 10 Spurwinged lapwing *Vanellus spinosus*

Family : *Columbidae*

- 11 Pintailed green pigeon *Treron apicauda*
12 Wedgetailed green pigeon *T. sphenura*
13 Greyfronted green pigeon *T. pompadora*
14 Bartailed cuckoo-dove *Macropygia unchall*
15 Spotted dove *Streptopelia chinensis*
16 Emerald dove *Chalcophaps indica*

Family : *Trogonidae*

- 17 Redheaded trogon *Harpactes erythrocephalus*

Family : *Alcedinidae*

- 18 Himalayan pied kingfisher *Ceryle lugubris*
19 Great blue kingfisher *Alcedo hercules*
20 Storkbilled kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis*

Family : *Meropidae*

- 21 Blubreasted bee-eater *Nyctornis athertoni*

Family : *Coraciidae*

- 22 Indian roller *Coracias benghalensis*
23 Broadbilled roller *Eurystomus orientalis*

Family : *Bucerotidae*

- 24 Whitethroated brown hornbill *Ptilolaemus lickelli*
25 Rufousnecked hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*
26 Wreathed hornbill *Rhyticeros undulatus*
27 Great pied hornbill *Buceros bicornis*

Family : *Capitonidae*

- 28 Great hill barbet *Megalaima virans*
29 Bluethroated barbet *Megalaima asiatica*

Family : *Picidae*

- 30 Large yellownaped woodpecker *Picus flavinucha*
31 Redeared bay woodpecker *Blythipicus pyrrhotis*

Family : *Eurylaimidae*

- 32 Longrailed broadbill *Psarisomus dalhousiae*

Family : *Pittidae*

- 33 Bluenaped pitta *Pitta nipalensis*

Family : *Laniidae*

- 34 Tibetan shrike *Lanius tephronotus*
35 Shrike *L. schach tricolor*

Family : *Oriolidae*

- 36 Blackheaded oriole *Oriolus xanthomus*

Family : *Dicruridae*

- 37 Grey drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*
38 Bronzed drongo *D. aeneus*
39 Lesser racket tailed drongo *D. remifer*
40 Haircrested drongo *D. hottentottus*
41 Greater racket tailed drongo *D. paradiseus*

Family : *Sturnidae*

- 42 Hill myna *Gracula religiosa*

Family : *Corvidae*

- 43 Green magpie *Cissa chinensis*
44 Blackbrowed treepie *Dendrocitta frontalis*
45 Himalayan treepie *D. formosae*
46 Jungle crow *Corvus macrorhynchus*

Family : *Irenidae*

- 47 Orangebellied chloropsis *Chloropsis hardwickii*
48 Goldmantled chloropsis *C. cochinchinensis*

Family : *Pycnonotidae*

- 49 Redwhiskered bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*
50 Redvented bulbul *P. cafer*
51 Browneared bulbul *Hypsipetes flavus*
52 Black bulbul *H. madagascariensis*
53 Striated green bulbul *P. striatus*
54 Whitethroated bulbul *Cinger flaveolus*
55 Rufousbellied bulbul *H. maclellandi*

Family : *Timaliinae*

- 56 Coralbilled scimitar babbler *Pomatorhinus ferruginosus*
57 Goldheaded babbler *Stachyris chrysaea*

- 58 Austen's spotted babbler *S. oglei*
 59 Greater redheaded parrotbill *Paradoxornis ruficeps*
 60 Necklaced laughing thrush *Garrulax moniligerus*
 61 Whitecrested laughing thrush *G. leucolophus*
 62 Yellowthroated laughing thrush *G. galbanus*
 63 Redthroated tit-babbler *Alcippe rufogularis*
 64 Nepal babbler *A. nipalensis*
 65 Yellownaped yuhina *Yuhina flavicollis*
 66 Silvereared mesia *Leiothrix argentauris*
 67 Redwinged shrike-babbler *Pteruthius flaviscapris*
 68 Whiteheaded shrike-babbler *Gampsorhynchus rufulus*
 69 Spectacled barwing *Actinodura egeroni*
 70 Redtailed minla *Minla ignotincta*
 71 Longtailed sibia *Heterophasia picaoides*

Family : Muscicapinae

- 72 Greyheaded flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis*
 73 Yellowbellied fantail flycatcher *Rhipidura hypoxantha*
 74 Whitethroated fantail flycatcher *Rhipidura albicollis*

Family : Sylviinae

- 75 Ground warbler *Tesia spp.*
 76 Goldenheaded tailorbird *Orthotomus cucullatus*
 77 Allied flycatcher-warbler *Sericercus affinis*
 78 Striated marsh warbler *Megalurus plaustis*

Family : Family : Turdinae

- 79 Orangebacked bush robin *Erithacus cyanurus*
 80 Daurian redstart *Phoenicurus auroreus*
 81 Plumbeous redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosus*
 82 Whitetailed blue robin *Cinclidium leucurum*
 83 Little forktail *Enicurus scouleri*
 84 Blackbacked forktail *E. immaculatus*
 85 Slatybacked forktail *E. schistaceus*
 86 Leschenaults forktail *E. leschenaultii*
 87 Spotted forktail *E. maculatus*
 88 Riverchat *Chaimarromis leucocephalus*
 89 Magpie robin *Copsychus saularis*
 90 Blue whistling thrush *Myiophonus caeruleus*

- 91 Chestnutbellied rock thrush *Monticola rufiventris*
 92 Greyheaded thrush *Turdus rubrocanus gouldii*
 93 Redthroated thrush *T.r. ruficollis*

Family : Cincillidae

- 94 Brown dipper *Cinclus pallasii*

Family : Paridae

- 95 Sultan tit *Melanochlora sultanæ*

Family : Sittidae

- 96 Beautiful nuthatch *Sitta formosa*

Family : Motacillidae

- 97 Indian tree pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

Family : Nectariniidae

- 98 Blackbreasted sunbird *Aethopyga saturata*
 99 Streaked spiderhunter *Arachnothera magna*

Family : Ploceidae

- 100 Tree sparrow *Passer montanus*

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Review – A Bibliographic Index to the Ornithology of the Indian Region — Part I (1995)

KUMAR GHORPADE, 1861 Bethel Street, St Thomas Town, Bangalore 560 084.

On the Editor's request I am writing this Review of the above paperback book. It is a compilation of an unknown number of papers and notes taken from the first 90 volumes of the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*, and the first 10 of *Stray Feathers, A Journal of Ornithology for India and its dependencies*, that were published between 1872 and 1994 (not 1873-1993 as indicated on the cover, etc.). The text is presented in two Sections, an Area Index (pp 1-72) and a Species Index (pp 73-160). A page each of Acknowledgments,

Introduction, References and Errata, and then a 13-page Index (more correctly a Keyword Index) complete the book.

This compilation under review I found disappointing. A scientific publication cannot be evaluated as a piece of art, wherein 'beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder'. It must be accurate, reliable and user-friendly, which Aasheesh perhaps attempted to do but, in the time available to him, has achieved an end result that is not very easy to use and decidedly incomplete, for most keywords he indexes the

3000+ or so references under. Are there any merits in this compilation after all? Yes: for an amateur bird watcher unfamiliar with a good library holding most of the JBNHS volumes (and with hardly any access to the SF ones), Aasheesh's compilation will at least provide an idea of, and an introduction to, what has been published during the past twelve decades or so in these two journals on our birds. Also, it is around one-fifth the price of a similar bibliography and index published by the Smithsonian Institution (USA), which latter included twice the number of citations taken from many other journals as well.

In my opinion, the limitations of this work need to be pointed out here to uninformed users, to prevent any deleterious assumptions or presumptions which may mislead them, especially as regards completeness and accuracy. Though I like the compact page formatting, where very little space wastage is evident, with a two column layout, each page carrying about 50-60 references, typesetting matter only in capitals wasn't a good idea, for a scientific publication. The citations are mostly free of typographical errors, but incorrect reproduction of titles, author names and page numbers are very evident. I found very few mistakes in the actual years of publication of references, which was a relief. Punctuation marks in titles aren't carefully followed, being omitted, like parentheses used by the author, and so on. A major lacuna for the informed user is the absence of information on any illustrations (including maps) that the articles or notes include. Papers written by more than two authors are unfortunately and unfairly (to the authors!) entered only in the first author's name followed by the Latin 'et al.' meaning 'and others'. Again, unknown authorship is indicated by 'ANON', which should have been spelled out fully as ANONYMOUS, to make sense to inexperienced users. Likewise, Roman numerals used originally in titles are changed to Arabic ones throughout the book, for no apparent reason. Sub-titles are also curiously left out and acronyms (like BNHS) utilised instead of the expanded words used in the original title.

There is no contents page so we are forced to thumb the pages to find what there is and where the Area Index ends and the Species Index begins. The single page Introduction is badly written (grammar and information content) and doesn't say much about what this 'Part I' contains and what 'Part II' will be about. But, as quoted in this NLBW issue's Editorial above, Aasheesh gives an idea of methods used by him in this *Newsletter* (Vol 34, No. 3, May/June 1994). He also wrote to me that "Part II will contain references from other major journals, newsletters, etc., e.g. NLBW, IBIS, FORKTAIL, OBC BULLETIN, AUK, etc. upto 1993. Subsequently I would like to bring out an annual index with citations from all these sources in a single volume." *Stray Feathers* was inaugurated in 1872 (not 1873) and its editor and publisher, Allan Octavian Hume, brought out eleven volumes at irregular intervals up to 1889 (not 10 volumes to 1881 as stated by Aasheesh). An additional Index (systematic and general) volume was prepared by C Chubb and published in 1899, which is Volume 12 of SF.

Incidentally, JBNHS 90(3) was published on April 1, 1994 so its volumes 1-90 span 1886-1994 (not 1993). Volume 11 (1888-1889) of SF carries a single 353-page paper by Hume on the birds of Manipur, Assam, Sylhet and Cachar, a tribute to the industry and ornithological know-how of its illustrious author. *Stray Feathers* Volumes 1-11 spanned 18 years (10 more to Vol.12) and the 90 of JBNHS cover almost 108 years (not 9 and 90 as indicated). To derive "maximum benefit from this [Area] Index", and "to get a complete picture of the literature" from the Species Index, we are asked to refer to three or more keywords listed in the 'back' Index (pp 163-175) as well as in the Area and Species Indexes. I must however warn users that Pittie's Index will prove to be incomplete and inadequate if you are hoping to find everything written about a species, and its occurrence in an area, in the JBNHS and SF. This reality, and the poor key-wording and cross-referencing methods used are the greatest drawbacks I encountered when using this work.

I will now comment on the Area and Species Indexes, from the viewpoint of a user, to see what one can hope to obtain by using this book. For me, Whistler and Kinnear's 17-part (not 16!) report on the Eastern Ghats Brds Survey (1930, 1932-1937) is perhaps one of the most important papers available in the JBNHS (Vols. 34-39). This survey covers Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, so I looked for it under these keywords in the Area Index, but did not find it there (!), even though an 'EASTERN GHATS' key-word is listed under Andhra Pradesh (but not under Tamil Nadu).

I was 'foxed' and assumed Aasheesh had inadvertently overlooked this series. Much later, I checked for Eastern Ghats in the Key-word Index at the back of the book and noticed 'p.3 and 18' against it. I had already looked up page 3 under Andhra Pradesh, so I checked page 18 to find these references (including just 3 more) to Eastern Ghats placed under 'INDIA'! Surely there are more than these 19 titles listed for the Eastern Ghats available in the JBNHS and SF? I know of two important papers by V Ball on the birds observed in the region north of the Godavari River extending to the Mahanadi and also the Ganges rivers (in SF 5: 410-420, 7: 191-235) which should have certainly been mentioned here, besides many others. To find Ball's papers with data on the ghats, we will have to look under Bihar (p.8) and Orissa (p.49), so you see my point? This alerted me to the fact that the indexing, key-word usage and cross-referencing logic utilized by Aasheesh wasn't going to make matters easy (and thorough) for the user of his book. Besides this problem, errors also abound. On pages 18-19, the final part XVI (JBNHS 39: 447-463) of Whistler & Kinnear's Eastern Ghats report is omitted, and wrong page numbers are entered for the Introductory part by Kinnear & Whistler (which should be JBNHS 34: 386-403; the sub-title 'Ornithological Section' is missing), for part III (which is 36: 67-93, not 36: 94-100) and for part VIII (which is 37: 281-297 not 298).

I then considered checking up what was listed under the 'Western Ghats', which are now recognized as one of the major faunal and floral centres ('Hot Spots') in our

subcontinent, and on whose butterflies and other insects (also birds) I am at present conducting research. Hoping not to repeat my earlier mistake and checking under the six States these mountains traverse, I found page 26 indicated against this key-word in the rear Index. But, to my surprise, only a couple of titles were included ! So, why are the Eastern and Western Ghats used as key-words, if the user can only obtain such incomplete documentation ? It is the same story with just about any other key-word listed, be it a town, protected area, geographical feature, district, state or a country. Do not expect any kind of completeness from Pittie's index; in almost every case I personally am aware of almost 1 1/2 to 2 times the number of references, published in these two journals, than Aasheesh lists for each.

Then there is no uniformity in the use of the area key-words as well. Currently used 'native' language spellings like Udhagamangalam (misspelled by Aasheesh without the 'h') for Ootacamund, and Chengalpattu for Chingleput, rub shoulders with anglicized spellings like Trivandrum and Trichur for what are now 'officially' Thiruvananthapuram and Thrissur. In my opinion, the correct, Anglicized spelling used for the past 100 years or more should be preferred over native language or even recent 'official' ones, if one is writing in English. Unless one has ample time to index every reference down to a district or a species, indexing each title to a *State* (or country, if small in area) and to a *Bird Family* would be practical and also useful to users. Area key-words in error are also fairly easily noticeable. 'TIPERA' (page 72) is an early English spelling for the current Tripura State, here misplaced under West Bengal. Also under this State a 'BOMBAY' occurs (p.71) ! Thekkady which is in Kerala is placed under Tamil Nadu (p.66). Abu should be written Mount Abu (p.57). Lyallpur in Pakistan (p.52) is now called Faisalabad, New Delhi should be Delhi (p.48), the Naga Hills and Nagaland are the same area (p.46). Lonavala is correctly spelt Lonavla, like Borivili is Borivli (pp.38-39). If Myanmar is used for Burma (p.43), then Tibet should have been listed as Xizang on page 10. It is gratifying to note that Aasheesh has also covered Burma, because for some reason Ripley decided to omit it in his OLD SYNOPSIS (1961), a trend that is unfortunately continuing to be followed, departing from the coverage of Stuart Baker's NEW FAUNA (1922-1930 and earlier. The Area Index is replete with omissions and errors and the key-words used have been very randomly selected (dictated by computer convenience ?) and are of limited value. Selection of key-words (at least State/Country and Bird Family/Genus) must be done by carefully *reading* (or rapidly scanning) *every page* of each title in the original; this is *critical*. If time and personal suitability do not allow one to finish a more or less complete and accurate work, this fact must be stated clearly as Burg, Beehler and Ripley (1994: 316) do in their Annotated Bibliography and Index. I myself abhor such 'first approximations' (a la Burg *et al.*) because these are 'neither here nor there', something a committed scientist cannot trust or rely upon.

The Species Index is inappropriately so named, since key-words include Genus, Family and English names too, as well as several general sub-heads under Biology and Ornithology. This index is even less reliable, user-friendly or complete than the Area Index, so expect very much less from this part of the book ! Perhaps for this Taxon Index just key-wording the Families of birds (Genera would be ideal but involve a lot of work for each reference indexed) that each citation includes would have been usable and useful. For more comprehensive titles that deal with almost all Indian bird families (like in a catalogue or a faunistic study), these could be indexed under the key-word 'Aves'. In this Index, the 'new' names listed in Pittie & Robertson's (1993) Review of changes in Indian Bird Nomenclature booklet are used, but also cross-referenced to the 'old' names in Ripley's NEW SYNOPSIS (1982). I intend to critically review the name changes (both scientific and English) in this booklet in a future issue of NLBW, but would like to inform readers here what Andrew Robertson wrote to me recently about it: "Certainly if you are undertaking an update of Aasheesh and my nomenclature booklet it will be important for you to see the complete OBC checklist since this very largely supersedes the booklet. The booklet was produced in something of a hurry and was not fully comprehensive even at the time it was published." Again, as far as completeness of the Species Index is concerned, I notice only 28 titles listed for the bustard, *Ardeotis nigriceps*, but Rahmani & Manakadan (1990, JBNHS 87: 175-194) include almost 50 from JBNHS and SF, and I myself compiled many more for a manuscript (in preparation) only from JBNHS ! Similarly, just 27 titles are listed by Aasheesh for the florican, *Eupodotis indica*, though Sankaran, Rahmani & Ganguli-Lachungpa (1992, JBNHS 89: 1156-179) cite 56 from these two journals.

Aasheesh states that he has cited under 'Biology' and 'Ornithology' references of a general nature, or those dealing with 'aspects of bird biology or the science of ornithology'. These two key-words (and their 44 sub-heads) demonstrate the utter futility of hoping to obtain any kind of complete indexing of the contents of JBNHS and SF through Pittie's Index. Many of the sub-heads of Biology are *not* part of it (like 'Ecology' on p.85), and should have been as *individual* key-words, inserted in appropriate places in alphabetical order. Only a dozen entries under 'Behaviour' and a single one each under 'Ecology', 'Conservation' and 'Economic', make a mockery of these sections in this book. This 'Bibliographic Index' therefore fails both in respect to accepted convention and format expected of a scientific bibliography, and with key-words an index of this kind should use, besides being terribly incomplete. However, if I hadn't done extensive bibliographic work myself I wouldn't have realized this, or had a choice, would I ? For the record, from a look at a few photocopied pages of Burg, Beehler & Ripley's similar book that Aasheesh sent me, even though that work cites some 6,000 titles from many other periodicals, their bibliography (annotated) and index are also nowhere near complete or free of errors. An idea of what a *complete* bibliography of Indian Bird literature (articles and books) would be is suggested by what Bikram Grewal wrote

to me recently: "I have a complete list of books published on Indian birds, and indeed have about 90% of them. My bibliography on published articles runs to over ten thousand entries. This is in collaboration with the OBC."

Even though I have been overly critical of Aasheesh's book, and for good reason, I urge every serious amateur (and professional) bird watcher to obtain a copy from him. It is very affordable and gives a reasonably good account of

what the JBNHS and SF did publish on our birds during the 122 years from 1872 to 1994. I hope future editions of this work will attempt to be more complete and correct, and a delight to use.

Compiled and Published by AASHEESH PITTIE, 8-2-545 Road No.7, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500 034, India. v+175 pp, Price: Rs 150 / £ 9.95 / US \$ 14.95 (postage extra).



I have gone through Dr. Kumar Ghorpade's review of my Bibliographic Index and try to explain below in greater detail, than I did in the Introduction to it, the way I went about and compiled this Index, and thus clarify some points raised by him in his review.

When compiling this index, I did assume that the title of a paper contains the most important aspect / aspects about it, which the author / authors talk about in the body of the paper, and which could be used as key-words for an index. The entire body of a paper or short note was not scrutinized for key-words at all. I did mention in my introduction that such an exercise was beyond the scope of the Index and required "an enormous amount of time and effort." The one fact which I feel should have been mentioned by me in my Introduction is that the key-words chosen and indexed to represent a paper, etc., were taken from the title of the paper or short note, and not gleaned from a detailed scrutiny of the complete text of the paper itself. Because of the omission of this one fact, most of Kumar's criticism does seem real. But when viewed from the above angle, the contents of the Index and the key-word index at its end become more realistic.

Also, when the indexing was begun, almost 10 years ago, I assumed that a birder looking for information would concentrate a search for information on either a bird (species, family, genus, etc.) or an area (political boundary, bio-geographical region, etc.). Thus the logic of compiling a species index and an area index. Of course, as is evident from the result, importance has been given to political areas mostly and not bio-geographical regions. Thus areas which are mentioned in the citation and also fall under a bio-geographical region, are indexed by place-name rather than under bio-geographical region eg., Khandala is indexed under 'Khandala' (p.38) and not under 'Western Ghats' (p.26) of which it is most certainly a part! There are many references which are either of general nature or do not specify the exact area of work, but generalize on say the Western Ghats region. Such references have been grouped under 'India' (p.18) as they form part of the country's physical features. In the Area index, major heads have been given to states (for India) so that the literature for a particular state is at one place.

Regarding the Species Index, the same arguments, as above, hold good. The methodology for indexing was the

Aasheesh Pittie's Reply

same. Here, some personal preferences and bias my have crept in regarding the indexing of some papers eg., Humayun Abdulali's catalogue of the collection of birds in the BNHS. It is a general paper covering almost all the species of the sub-continent and could have been indexed under 'Aves' or under major family heads. But I thought it would be more useful to index each species separately. But there might be many other works which warrant such detailed indexing. I do not deny it and I too look forward to such a detailed index. It is quite probable that a paper on the Western Ghats has a checklist of birds seen which includes the brownbreasted flycatcher *Muscicapa muttui*, of which we know so little. But I would have indexed the paper on the area, as it was not my purpose to index checklists in detail. It is obvious that a person interested in this particular species would search out its distribution in the Handbook and then look at all the references under the appropriate area in the Area Index and under the species name in the Species Index, in my Bibliographic Index. I am sure it reduces work a great deal. Though Kumar mentions that under *Ardeotis nigriceps* only 28 titles are listed by me "but Rahmani and Manakadan (1990, JBNHS 87: 175-194) include almost 50 from JBNHS and SF", an actual scrutiny of thier paper reveals that the key-words in the titles of many of these references make them candidates for being indexed under various other heads rather than *Ardeotis nigriceps*. References which do not fit under any of the above criteria were indexed under a more general key-word like 'ecology' and 'ornithology, economic', etc. This pattern has been necessarily repeated throughout the book. I urge users to extend the above arguments to every reference they are searching for.

Any indexing activity, until and unless it is an extremely detailed key-word index of every 'appropriate' word on each page of a paper, will be intrinsically incomplete. And when it is actually done (What a gigantic task!), would become quite voluminous, deserving CD-ROM based computerization.

I cannot claim that this is a complete index to the bibliography of the Indian region and that a user need not look beyond it for his/her requirements, far from it, for that is not the scope of this book at all. I concede that there are mistakes and omissions which will surface as more people use it and bring them to light so that they can be rectified in the next edition.

Correspondence

A HERONRY IN THE HEART OF A CITY. SHAHLA YASMIN, C/o Mona Sales Corporation, Babunia Road, P.O. Siwan 841 226, North Bihar

Patna, the capital of Bihar is located on the banks of the Ganges. The Gangetic plain was once rich in living resources. But, with the spread of agricultural practices and the rise in human population, most of the forests were lost taking away with them the animal populations, including the birds. The hostile attitude of the people has made this area inhospitable to the migratory birds. Fortunately, a group of children formed an organization called 'Tarumitra' (friends of trees) in 1988. Since then, this organization has expanded and at present it has over 23,000 student members. Tarumitra activists protest against tree felling and are actively engaged in tree plantation. Their activities have strongly influenced the attitude of people.

The activities of Tarumitra students have been 'felt' by the birds too, for they have taken refuge in the campus of St. Joseph's Convent, which is situated in the centre of Patna city beside a very busy road close to the Ganges. The school's campus has some very old trees. I visited the campus on 17.06.1996 and found more than 50 nests of night herons, *Nycticorax nycticorax* and little cormorant, *Phalacrocorax niger* on an imli tree, *Tamarindus indica*. There were more nests on four of the Ashoka trees, *Polyalthia longifolia* and two on the neem trees, *Azadirachta indica*. I was told by the authorities of the school that the birds used to come to the school campus every year and leave by February for nesting somewhere else. This year they have nested in the school campus. Since, the school has a nursery for plants just beneath the imli tree, the authorities are upset by the birds dirtying the place. Some of the plants were destroyed and the place has become unsuitable for the children to assemble. But it is noteworthy that the children do not disturb the birds.



RARE VISITS OF SOME DUCKS, PAINTED STORK AND GLOSSY IBIS TO THE TANKS OF DHARWAD (KARNATAKA : INDIA). R.N. DESAI, Vivekanand Nagar, Dharwad 580 004

Various species of ducks which are residents of northern parts of Asia and also breed there, migrate to different parts of south as well as south-east Asia during winter. Comb duck, garganey, northern shoveller and spotbill are some of this category, while the Indian whistling duck is the resident and a breeder in the latter regions (Bhushan et al, 1993). In India migration of these ducks to different parts has been reported by various workers (vide Verghese et al, 1993). In Karnataka garganey, spotbill duck and the Indian whistling duck have been sighted in Shimoga and Gudavi (Gururaj et al, 1993), garganey and spotbill duck in the tanks of southern region of Dharwad district (Uttangi, 1994) and only the Indian

whistling duck in some tanks around Dharwad city (Uttangi, 1985). Likewise, the common pochard and the northern pintail have been sighted recently in Attiveri and Gidada-Hubballi tanks near Dharwad city (Desai, 1984).

During our recent survey (1996) for the wetland birds we have sighted some of these birds in a few tanks around Dharwad 15°17' N and 75°03' E). Besides these ducks, the painted stork and the glossy ibis have also been sighted. The details are as mentioned in Table 1.

Table 1

Bird species	Tanks visited				
	A	B	C	D	E
Garganey	-	7	32	32	-
Spotbill duck	9	-	8	-	-
Northern shoveller	-	-	-	7	18
Indian whistling duck	-	4	10	-	-
Comb duck	10	-	-	-	-
Glossy ibis	-	-	2	-	-
Painted stork	-	-	-	-	2

A. Gidada-Hubballi
C. Nuggikeri
E. Navalur

B. Kelageri
D. Alnavar

The Indian whistling ducks were sighted for the first time in tanks around Dharwad by Uttangi (1985). The present report is only the second of its kind. This indicates the rare visits of this duck to this part of Karnataka.

The same is true of the comb-ducks too. The present report is the first one from Karnataka. The wide distribution of garganey, spotbill duck and the northern shoveller in most parts of India including southern parts of Dharwad district (Uttangi, 1994) suggests that they are regular visitors to Karnataka. However, their arrival at the small tanks around Dharwad only this year might be due to constraints of inadequate rain-fall in the Indian peninsula last year (1995) and the consequent untimely drying up of many water bodies in the region. It may be considered as a rare visit.

Sightings of glossy ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* in India are only a few till today (vide Verghese et al, 1993). Ours is the maiden report from Karnataka. Finally, the present sighting of the painted stork *Mycteria leucocephala* in the Dharwad tanks is also the first of its kind.

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SOME OBSERVATIONS ON MATING IN THE BLUEWINGED PARAKEET *PSITTACULA COLUMBOIDES*.
C. VENKATRAMAN and V. GOKULA, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Kalampalayam, Coimbatore 641 010

Bluewinged parakeet is endemic to the Western Ghats and very common in moist deciduous forest of Siruvani foot hills; where we have been conducting long term studies on birds since 1993. On 24th December I saw a pair at 12.30 pm just outside our field station. Disturbed by the common myna, the pair flew away from our vicinity. The next evening, I found a female bluewinged parakeet looking in a hole in a *Melia dubia* tree. After a few seconds, a male came and perched next to the female. Then the male flew to a nearby tree; the female followed and perched close to the male. The male sidled up close to the female who responded by squatting herself flat, with neck extended in front, fluttering her back by slightly opening and raising her wings. The male now climbed on to the female's back with the help of his beak and commenced a series of proceedings similar to those described by Ali (1927) and Tiwari (1930) for Roseringed and Blossomheaded parakeets respectively. Both, the tickling behaviour and repeated mating were not observed as reported by Tiwari (1930) and Ali (1927). I observed these from about 10 m distance and 15 m from the ground. The mating occurred at 1708 hrs and lasted for 42 seconds.

Two more pairs were also observed mating in the same month at various hours of a day (0900 and 1035 am). It would appear that the mating may take place at any hour of the day and is not confined to early mornings like as in roseringed parakeet.

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THE MEDIAN EGRET — (*EGRETTA INTERMEDIA*) IRIS COLORATION. V. GURUSWAMI, Simpson Estate, Madras 600 082

The median egret is one of three species of egrets which breed in the Simpson Estate. This egret seems to favour

S.W. Monsoon-synchronised breeding cycle (June-September).

DATA

Season	Number of breeding pairs	Resident population
July 1991 (S.W. Monsoon)	6	30
July 1992 (S.W. Monsoon)	2	2
October 1993 (N.E. Monsoon)	1	Less than 10
July 1994	3	10
July 1995	3	Less than 20
July 1996	6	25 +



During the breeding cycles, the birds were observed at close quarters through 10-power binoculars. One curious phenomenon was consistently noticed. When observed under certain light conditions, bright direct sunlight or diffused light of reasonable intensity, the Iris looks light orange or bright red. When the bird ducks to arrange nest material or accept nest material from its mate, the Iris reverts to the normal yellow colour. When this phenomenon was first noticed in July 1991 in most of the six pairs, it was just treated as an aberration in the birds observed.

Subsequent observations involving all the breeding birds and the non-breeding residents under various light conditions revealed a consistency on these colour changes.

During July 1996 each of the 25+ birds were observed during diffused light conditions (cloudy day) and bright light during clear weather. In all cases, the Iris looked Red when the birds were in the open and exposed to light. As they duck down to incubate eggs or arrange nest material, the colour reverts to yellow.

There is no mention of red Iris in some of the standard books referred.

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SARUS CRANES IN GUJARAT. Dr. S.C. VASHISHTHA, District Immunization Officer, 2/3 Panchayatan, Mission Road, Nadiad 387 001, Gujarat

Since my transfer to district Kheda, Gujarat in the month of February '96 from Bharuch, I have observed isolated pairs of sarus cranes on different days of my tours in the areas as follows :

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| — 2 pairs | - near village Pariyej |
| — 1 pair | - in between village Vadgam and Khambhat |
| — 1 pair | - in between Khambhat and Petlad |
| — 1 pair | - in between Dakor and Nes. |

On 12th June 1996, on a visit to the Primary Health Centre, Dhunadhara, nearly 8 kms from Dakor town I observed 28 sarus cranes on the outskirts of a small pond at the entrance to the village.

In view of the communication received from Mr Aasheesh Pittie dated 15th November 1995, in which sarus cranes have been included in the list of Threatened birds of Asia — candidate list of species from India, this observation may be relevant.



BIRDS NEAR ALIBAG. RAHUL PURANDARE, 18A, Kapila Society, Gokhale Nagar, Pune 411 053

I had been to Alibag and other places for the first time in (or around) 1985-86. Since then, I have been there quite often but don't remember having seen ashy swallow shrikes. Neither my notes show any evidence of it! Since you are visiting the place for a long time (and perhaps very regularly) you can trace out the reasons for the vanishing of the species! You have also mentioned seeing a shaheen falcon, but I think that would be a stray wanderer! The bird I guess has no nesting sites (Cliffs etc.) around Alibag. In the recent visit I could remember a night heron seen there (at Kihim) and giving its famous 'Waaks' call!. The entire seashore provides an opportunity to observe many seabirds, waders and even sea eagles! Many other creatures (including the lovely Ghost Crabs) are delightful to watch!



AIR-SALLYING IN BLACKHEADED ORIOLE (ORIOLEUS XANTHORNUS). G. MAHESWARAN, Stork Ecology Project, Centre for Wildlife & Ornithology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh 202 002, India

On 28 February, 1996 at 1755 hrs I was watching the redvented bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) numbering more than 20 catching winged termites which were flying at a height of 20-25 meters. Those termites were emerging from the wet ground due to the heavy rain the Park experienced four days back. In the meantime, one blackheaded oriole (*Oriolus xanthornus*) joined the fray to catch the winged termites (alates). I saw it catch nine termites during its aerial sallies. It took 4 to 5 seconds to catch one insect. After catching the insect, it perched on a *Simul* (*Bombax ceiba*) tree to devour it.



NEW RECORD OF COMMON CRANE *GRUS GRUS* IN GOPAL CHAPORI, ASSAM. RATHIN BARMAN, Animal Ecology and Wildlife Biology Laboratory, Department of Zoology, Gauhati University 781 014, Assam

Described as an occasional visitor in Assam by Ali and Ripley (1983), the common crane *Grus grus* Linnaeus has been regularly recorded in some parts of Assam in recent years. It has been recorded in Majuli (Talukdar, 1944), Dabali Chapori (Chaudhury, 1990), Dichangmukh and Jhanjimukh (Saikia and Bhattacharjee, 1990). But not more than 15 birds have been recorded. However, on December 10, 1995, I

sighted common cranes in Gopal Chapori near Sivasagar, and counted as many as 58 birds in the area (about 5 sq kms). The habitat where the birds were found, had a good cover of Khagari (*Saccharum* sp.) and Jhau Ban (*Tamarix diocia*).

This is the first record of common cranes in this area, as well as the first record of common cranes in such a large flock in Assam.

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A FEW EXAMPLES OF ETHNO-MEDICO- ORNITHOLOGY OF TRIBALS OF RAJASTHAN. SATISH KUMAR SHARMA, Forest Range Officer, Aravalli Afforestation Project, Jhadol (F.), Dist. Udaipur (Rajasthan) 313 702

Bhils, Kathodis, Garasias, Damors are the main tribes of southern Rajasthan. Various birds are used in different folk-medicines by tribals to cure the diseases of human beings. Information on such folk-medicines of tribals is given below (Area where medicine is in vogue is given in parentheses):-

- 1 Whitebreasted kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) : Feathers burnt and ash given to cure typhoid. Flesh is also used. (Jhadol, Udaipur).
- 2 Indian roller (*Coracias bengalensis*) : In case of ear-pain or suppuration, feathers are rubbed in water and the liquid used as ear-drop (Jhadol, Udaipur).
- 3 Saras crane (*Gurus antigone*) : Eggs are eaten by TB patients.
- 4 House crow (*Corvus splendens*) : The tongue of a crow is a cure for lost memory (Jhadol, Udaipur).
- 5 Common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) : The fat is eaten as a cure for whooping cough. (Tatapur, Alwar; Dhala, Udaipur).



STRUGGLING FOR SURVIVAL IN A NEW ENVIRONMENT

When I was a boy, pipits, larks and quails were commonly seen in stubble land, grass-land, grass covered stoney hill side, swamps and shrubs around the villages in the Nilgiris. The monoculture of tea and coffee has spread all over the Nilgiris and changed the face of the Blue mountain into a green desert.

However, in this "catastrophic" situation, we do come across rare birds and we have taken a photograph of a black breasted or rain quail (*Coturnix coromandelica*) in a field.

We have been spreading awareness about the importance of birds through the Longwood Shola Bird Club

and here we list the birds which have been rescued by our club.

Banded Crane

On March 19th 1989, a domestic cat grabbed a banded crane *Rallina eurizonoides* alive and brought it to the kitchen of a farm-house from a swamp nearby our village. That bird was saved by a boy from the mouth of the cat and kept in a basket safely. After a day he brought the bird to our bird club, being unable to fly, because its wings were hurt by the cat. The bird was kept under our care until fit to fly, and finally it was released by us.

Little Bustard Quail

On June 10th 1991, some boys found a little bustard quail *Turnix sylvatica* while watching the goats which were grazing in a stubble field. The bird had a broken leg and they brought it to us. We fixed splints on the broken portion of the leg with adhesive tape and kept the bird until the leg was healed. Then we released the bird and were overjoyed when it took off.

Black Breasted Quail or Rain Quail

On 28th November 1996 some boys found a black breasted quail (*Coturnix coromandelica*) flying weakly in a stubble field near the village. They were chasing the bird which finally entered into the house of a farmer to protect itself.

Our well wisher Mr M. Sivaji of Jackanarai village, on hearing the news rescued the bird from the boys. He kept the bird for a night and the next morning he gave the bird to us. We gave some first aid and the bird began to walk and fly normally after a day of its arrival. We took some snaps and released it into the wild.



SIGHTING OF A YELLOW ROSERINGED PARAKEET.
RAJAT BHARGAVA and FAHMEEDA HANFEE, Centre for Wildlife & Ornithology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh 202 002, Uttar Pradesh

While going to WWF-India Delhi, from NOIDA, we sighted a yellow roseringed parakeet *Psittacula krameri* at the Nizamuddin bridge at about 9.00 hrs on 22nd April 1996 perched on an electric wire with three more parakeets. The colour of the head appeared somewhat greenish while the

rest of the body colour was light yellow. The bird was quite prominent due to its odd colour which was easily distinguishable due to the presence of normal coloured individuals of same species. The bird was most likely, a female as it was observed being fed by another parakeet, and also as the sighting was in the peak breeding season of roseringed parakeet. The bird was probably a partial lotino parakeet.



Announcements

Selim Ali Young Biologist Award

The Salim Ali Young Biologist Award has been instituted by the Bombay Natural History Society during his birth centenary year (1995-96) in memory of Dr Salim Ali.

The Award will be given annually in recognition of outstanding work of scientists below the age of 35 (as on 31st December preceding the year of award). Only those born on or after January 1, 1964 are eligible for consideration in 1996. The work done in India by the nominee will be taken into consideration for the award.

The awardee will be presented a citation and cash award of Rs 15,000/-.

Nominations for the awards for 1996 may be made by the established scientific societies of all India character, university faculties and departments or research institutions. The last date for the receipt of nominations is August 1996.



Salim Ali Naturalist Award

The Salim Ali Naturalist Award has been instituted by the Bombay Natural History Society in memory of Dr Salim Ali during his birth centenary year (1995-96).

The award will be given annually for outstanding work by an individual or an NGO in the field of nature conservation, nature study, nature education or restoration, anywhere in India. The nominee must have had a proven track record in the above mentioned fields which has enabled him/her to influence the public for general awareness about the environment and conservation action. The work already recognised for any other award will not be accepted.

Cover : Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*). This dark graceful bird with a long neck, is often found in large numbers in big permanent swamps and lakes of Australia. Swans are the largest of the waterfowl. They feed on aquatic plants and small aquatic animals.

Photo : S. Sridhar, ARPS

Editor : ZAFAR FUTEHALLY, No. 2205, Oakwood Apartments, Jakkasandra Layout, Koramangala 3rd Block, 8th Main, Bangalore 560 034.

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Tel. : 3364142 Fax : 3364682
E-Mail : <sridhar.navbrat@access.net.in>

Rare bird of the Mountains

MARK COCKER

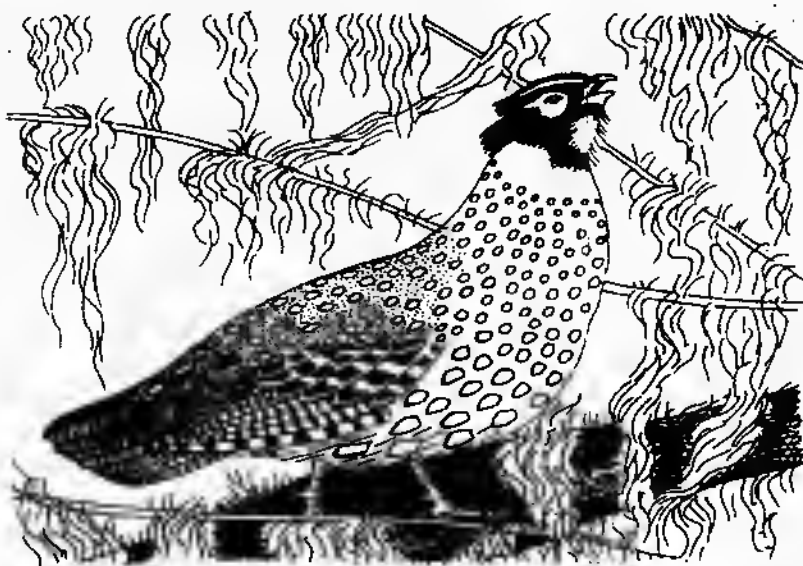
A loose translation of the name, satyr tragopan, might be "horned god of the woods", and for once I feel the early naturalists found a title to match the creature itself. It's a type of pheasant, but any attempt to describe the bird in terms of the hand-reared fowl that blunder daily into British car windscreens is like trying to compare an Apache warrior to a balding, overweight businessman.

Imagine a bird the size of a really big cockerel with an electric blue face, black feather horns that he can erect when excited, and a body plumage of deep blood red. Overlaying this magical colour are hundreds of white ocelli, each encircled by a crisp black margin and so bright they seem almost luminous.

Most western ornithologists agree that it's the ultimate species on any birdwatching trip to the Nepalese Himalayas. These mountains comprise most of the tragopan's world distribution, although the Nepalese bird atlas shows that the species has been seen in just 10 of the 81 tetrads covering the country. Moreover, its highly restricted range on paper only hints at the exertions involved in finding it on the ground.

Tragopans are mainly recorded between 8,500 and 12,500 feet and are creatures of dense oak and rhododendron forest with thickets of bamboo. To add spice to the challenge they favour extremely steep slopes. My previous quest lasted about a fortnight in an area sandwiched between the mountains of Annapurna and Dhaulagiri.

Every morning we would gaze up at these five-mile-high giants looming on either side of the Kali Gandaki valley, the deepest in the world, and reflect on how they seemed the perfect setting for the ultimate Himalayan bird.



Each day then resolved into long exhausting ascents, frequent halts as our lungs began to panic in the thin mountain air, followed by jaded descents during mid-afternoon. I came to understand why so few ornithologists have made the effort to see more than a handful of tragopans, and why some have settled for the sight of a female, a subtle blend of grey and brown sprinkled with dull spots.

It is probably because of these fruitless memories that it seemed incredible, during a recent visit to the Himalayas, that I could be listening to this mythic creature just a stone's throw away through the forest. So typical of the bird, the male's dawn call is an unearthly and un-avian wail, usually transliterated as "W-a-a-a-a". Both this and its other main call - a repeated "Ka-ka-ka-ka-ka-ka-ka" - have a quite definite mocking quality. We crept towards the direction of these sounds until it was so close it seemed equally incredible that we still couldn't actually see it.

There is one further dimension to my obsession with tragopans, which

concerns the person who accompanied me 13 years ago during my previous search. After I had left Nepal he made a final mountain trek and reached a place called Tharepati in the Langtang National Park, to the north of the capital, Kathmandu. Ignoring the strains of the climb to this mist-shrouded spot, he went out in search of the tragopans he could hear calling, and has never been seen since.

Suddenly, almost casually, our tragopan wandered into view. For one, perhaps two seconds I watched it as it descended the tree from which it had been calling. I could make out its large, full-chested shape, the dark face and brilliant red plumage.

The circumstances of my friend's disappearance made this individual bird one of the most beautiful and haunting I have seen in my life.

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